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DOCUMENTS

SOME WAR-TIME LETTERS

Eldon J. Canright, the author of these letters from the front in the great war, was a graduate of the Wauwatosa high school with the class of 1912. For several years thereafter he was in the employ of a wholesale grocery establishment of Milwaukee. In March, 1917, he became a salesman for a firm of manufacturing chemists of Chicago; in May of the same year he enlisted in the First Regiment, Illinois National Guard, which unit was shortly afterward mustered into United States service as the One Hundred and Forty-ninth Field Artillery, which in time became one of the units of the famous Forty-second, popularly known as the "Rainbow" Division, of the American Expeditionary Force.

Canright received his preliminary training at Fort Sheridan during the summer of 1917, and sailed with his regiment for France in November of that year. He was soon promoted to the rank of sergeant and stationed as a dentist's assistant back of the line; but dissatisfied with this situation he asked to be relieved and joined the men as a private on the firing line. Save for a few days of illness, he was with his regiment on the firing line a total of one hundred and eighty days, during which time the Forty-second Division was several times commended for bravery by the French government and by our own. Upon the conclusion of the armistice Canright's unit was sent into Germany, where he remained throughout the winter and spring of 1918-19. His period of service covered, therefore, the entire period of American participation in the war on the Western Front. For copies of the letters, as well as for the facts here presented, acknowledgments are due Miss Amy M. Brown of Fairmont, Minnesota, a cousin of the writer. In printing the letters, entries of an intimate or inconsequential character have not been reproduced.

ON ACTIVE SERVICE WITH THE
AMERICAN EXPEDITIONARY FORCE

NOVEMBER 5, 1917

MY DEAR FOLKS: I suppose you have been wondering why I haven't written, but this is the first opportunity that I have had, as we have been traveling since I wrote you last.

We had a lovely voyage across the ocean. The weather was ideal. There were many exciting and interesting events, but I cannot tell you about them. We saw flying fish, dolphins, etc., too, but nevertheless we were very glad to see land.

I am very much in love with France and with the French people. The refined or better class are *very* good looking. They have dark hair and eyes and olive complexions, but there are a few fair complexioned people. They think the American soldiers are kings—everywhere we are treated with the utmost respect and courtesy, although they cannot understand us. But they have a rather embarrassing habit of kissing you on both cheeks. (Of course, when some pretty French girl kisses you, you don't mind!)

Needless to say, I am in love with the children. They are all very cute and pretty, and I've made several friends, although we can't talk to each other. We just make motions and you'd laugh to see me trying to make them understand.

Of course everything here is very different from the good old "U.S.A." The streets are very narrow and so are the sidewalks, and the houses are all built of brick or stone and the poorer classes have thatched roofs but some of the houses are very pretty although, of course, all of them have high stone fences around them. They have lovely yards and gardens and everything is clean—much cleaner than in the cities or country in the United States. There is really no country here; we think of it because the farms are very small, not much larger than a truck garden, but are intensively tilled.

Fruit is very cheap. You can buy apples or pears, all you can eat for fifty centimes (10c), but other foodstuffs are expensive. Pie is three francs (about 60c in our money) and ice cream and candy bars one franc, etc.

The time here is six hours earlier than yours so I am getting ready for bed when you are eating your dinner. (I go to bed early here for reasons that I can't tell you.)

Mail is very irregular and uncertain so I don't know when, if ever, you will receive this letter.

I cannot buy good cigars here, at any price, so for Christmas all I want you to send me is *cigars*; send either Tom Moore or Robert Burns brand of cigars.

With heaps of love, I am

Yours,

ELDON,

149th Field Artillery, Sanitary Detachment, A.E.F. Via New York

SOMEWHERE IN FRANCE

December 14, 1917

MY DEAR FOLKS: I received your most welcome and interesting letters just a few days ago, and am hastening to reply as this is the first chance I have had to write. Please excuse pencil and bum stationery. It's all I have.

Mail is very irregular here as we only receive mail once or twice a month. I am sure if our friends and relatives at home knew how much letters from "The States" mean to us, and how anxiously we await mail day, they would not "count" letters with us and would feel well repaid for their trouble.

Blanche asked me if this country looked different from ours. Well, it certainly does—no matter where you go, in the city or small towns or country. And the French people are just as lovely and charming as they have been reported to be.

I was fortunate enough to get a few days' leave last week, so I went to one of the large cities near here and was a gentleman of leisure once more, and *believe me* it sure did seem good! I stayed at one of the nicest hotels in the city—had a lovely room too. You cannot imagine how good it seemed to sleep in a real bed once more and have clean sheets and a pillow! And to be able to sleep as long as I wanted to in the morning instead of getting up at reveille every morning. My room had a great big fireplace in it, too; so it was always warm when I got up, as the

"bellboy" (an old man) always came in and started the fire before I got up. The hotel was steamheated, too, but nevertheless they used the fireplace.

They have some very queer customs in this country. For instance, no matter where you go, even the most modern hotels and restaurants serve you a *whole* loaf of bread with your order, and you are supposed to cut off a slice as you want it, which would be bad enough if the loaf were small like ours; but they are great long affairs, about two and a half feet long (we say they must sell it by the yard), and shaped about like a baseball bat. So you can imagine how graceful (?) "yours truly" looked cutting (or rather trying to) a huge loaf of bread. And with the dining room filled with French people looking on! They never serve coffee with your meals, but you have all the wine or champagne you want. They also consider roast snails a delicacy but excuse me! However, I wish you could have some of the lovely French pastry, as they sure do know how to make delicious pies, cakes, etc.

The trains here are very different from ours. The coaches are divided into sections with side doors entering into each section. There are about eight sections to a car and each section seats six persons—three ride facing forward and three backward. The section, of course, extends the entire length of the car, just as our open street cars. The conductor does not come through the train when it is in motion, but climbs in or rather sticks his head in while you are at the station. The sections (first class) are very beautifully upholstered and are about the same size and the side doors are just like the doors to a limousine. They even have the strap for raising and lowering the window! They do not have any dining cars on their trains, as they stop at certain towns along the way, and everybody gets off and goes to a hotel or restaurant. Nor do they have any sleepers. They generally stop off at some town over night or just sleep in the sections. Their engines are not like ours either, but I'll not attempt to describe them except to say that they look like a 1618 model instead of a 1918. But nevertheless it is very comfortable riding on their trains. Oh! yes, I forgot to say that while their roadbeds are very well made, still they are not laid out like ours,

but wind in and out, and instead of cutting through a hill or filling in a low place, they just climb up over the hill and coast down into the valley, so one minute the old engine is puffing and tugging up hill (sometimes you think she isn't going to make it), and the next minute you are going "hell bent for election" down hill! I wish you could travel through this country as the scenery is very beautiful and so different from ours. The French are very religious and every city or town has a large church or cathedral right in the middle of it. Their churches and other buildings are very beautiful—have wonderful carvings, paintings, etc. As you go through the country you pass the farmhouses—always small, stone affairs, but whitewashed and very clean. You will see the French peasants plowing with oxen, or perhaps driving to town in a great, high, two-wheeled cart with a brake on it operated by a crank, just like our old-fashioned street cars. It looks funny to see the guy spinning that crank when he comes to a hill. Perhaps the car is drawn by two oxen (horses are scarce) but, if so, they are not hitched side by side as we do but one in front of the other. I rode to a small town near here in one last Saturday and was terribly afraid I'd fall out of the old thing, but I hung on all right. And always you will see the cider press, a huge old-fashioned thing. The poorer people drink cider instead of wine and they just dry out the part of the apple that is left after the juice has been taken out and cut it into squares and use it as fuel in their fireplaces. (Wood is very scarce, you know.) Every house has a huge fireplace extending along one whole side of the room. Oh! and I forgot to tell you that the house and barn are all one building. Sometimes the family lives upstairs, over the stable, or else they live in one end of the building and the cattle in the other. But no matter where you go the French treat you with the utmost respect and courtesy. They are very polite, even the children.

I have met and made friends with a very fine young French soldier. He helps me with my French and I help him with his English. You should hear me (or rather see me!) trying to talk French.

France is a beautiful country and the French people are charming; but for all that, there are too many thousand miles

separating me from the good old U.S.A.! We are "strangers in a strange land" and there is nothing can take the place of home and friends, you know.

Our camp is situated on a high hill or young mountain and we get a very good view of the surrounding country. You can see down the valley for miles, and see little towns here and there. The houses look like little white spots with the inevitable church spire in the center. And you can see the roads winding in and out, too. The roads in this country are very good. The trees are covered with bright holly berries and also mistletoe. It makes me think of the holidays and that makes me homesick. Gee! I sure will be lonesome this Christmas.

One of our men was buried the other day with military honors. It was sure impressive. The coffin was wrapped in the American flag and placed on a gun carriage drawn by six black horses. The entire regiment marched at half time behind the gun carriage. The band played a funeral march and the regimental standards were reversed. At the grave a volley was fired by his and one by the French firing squad. As the coffin was lowered the bugler blew "taps." Did I tell you I had taken out \$10,000 life insurance for Margaret? Have you received any notice from Washington?

With much love, I am
E. J. CANRIGHT,
149th Field Artillery
Sanitary Detachment
American Expeditionary Force
Via New York

SOMEWHERE IN FRANCE

March 8, 1918

MY DEAR FOLKS: We are now and have been for some time many, many miles from where we were when I wrote you last. We are now at the front and are doing our "bit" for sure. Some of us are stationed in the trenches and some of us in a ruined and deserted village just behind the lines. There is no one in the village but the soldiers and lots of rats. We sleep in empty buildings and at night the rats run away with our shoes (at

least it sounds that way). We sleep on the floor, too. However, I am detailed as dental assistant, so am located in a larger town, a little farther back. There are civilians living in this town, although it has been bombarded several times and many buildings have been destroyed.

We are within range of the guns and can hear them pounding away day and night. At night you can see the flashes of the guns and when the "Big Toms," as they call them, open up, you think sure the buildings are coming down because they shake so much. There are no lights in the town at night, all windows, etc., have heavy shutters and there are no street lights. Day and night the French scout machines fly over the city, constantly on the lookout for any German airplane that might try to come over. We have had two or three pretty exciting air battles already.

We wear our gas-masks at all times, or rather I mean, carry them, as they can throw gas bombs in this town, too. It is a funny experience living in constant danger of shell fire, etc. But for all that the civilian population goes about its daily work or pleasures, very much as it does in times of peace. You can go out into one of the beautiful parks here, any Sunday afternoon, and you will see many French civilians strolling through the parks and probably an American band will be giving a concert; but along the drive where in times of peace automobiles would be going, you will see long rows of the "Big Toms" (the large guns drawn by motor trucks), and as I have said, you will hear the "purring" of the airplanes overhead and also the roar and rumble of the guns, and in almost every direction you will see buildings that have been destroyed by shell fire.

There are many beautiful homes and châteaux, as well as towns and villages along the front, that have been destroyed by the shells. It just makes you sick to see them, and you wonder what has become of the people who lived in them before the war.

Of course, the manners and customs of the people in this part of France are just like they were where we came from, with the exception of a few minor details. For instance, here, instead of making their bread in long loaves, as they do in the other part of France, they make them round with a hole in the center,

just like a huge doughnut. You can picture me most any afternoon strolling along the Rue de —, with a loaf of that bread around my arm. You carry it by shoving your arm through the hole. Savy? The bread is very good and I eat lots of it. Another funny custom they have is of locking their doors, by simply stepping outside and unscrewing the handle to the outside doorknob. They take the handle in with them, of course. You see in that way they can open the door from the inside readily enough but not from the outside.

And you should see the way the poor peasants do their washing. They carry the clothes to the river and they have a board a good deal like our ironing boards. They dip the clothes in the river, then lay them on the board and soap them well. Then they take another board shaped like a paddle and pound the clothes with this board (of course they are spread out on the other board). Isn't that a funny way to wash? It's so much easier to take a scrubbing brush and use that on them. (I know from experience, as all soldiers wash their own clothes. It's great sport. Nit.)

If this war lasts much longer I may bring my sisters a young French girl for a sister-in-law! There surely are some charming ones here. They have the most beautiful complexions. (They are not artificial either.) And their manners are perfect. Oh, I'm hard hit all right.

Love,
E. J. CANRIGHT,
Sanitary Detachment
149th Field Artillery
A.E.F. via New York

SOMEWHERE IN FRANCE

March 14, 1918

MY DEAR MRS. PIERSON: I am going to try and describe to you what it is like in the trenches. Understand, of course, I cannot describe any certain battle, but what I am going to describe can and does take place anywhere along our front.

Try and imagine yourself standing in one of the trenches on the "fire control" step, or in one of the advanced "listening

posts." It is a beautiful evening, with the stars shining overhead and everything is so calm and peaceful that it is hard to realize that there are hundreds, nay thousands, of guns and tens of thousands of soldiers lying waiting and watching. Perhaps you have been on duty for some time and you are tired and as everything is quiet you look at your watch and it is between two and three o'clock in the morning. Your thoughts turn toward home, and you wonder what your friends are doing as it is early evening there. You wonder if they can see the same stars that you can see overhead. Then all of a sudden a rocket goes up, bursting over "No Man's Land," casting a red or perhaps a green light. That is the signal and then "Hell breaks loose." (That describes it so pardon the word.) Guns begin to roar and pound on all sides of you—the noise is deafening. You can see the flashes of the guns as they fire and you can hear the "whine" of the shells as they go through the air. In fact, you can tell when a shell is coming toward you as you can hear it "whining" as it comes toward you and all you can do is to crouch down and pray God it will not strike where you are. If it does it will be "taps" for you (as we say), or rather what is left of you! You can tell a "high explosive" shell from a "gas shell" because when a high explosive shell bursts it gives a sharp "crash," destroying everything near it, while a "gas shell" explodes with a "pop," very similar to the sound a bottle makes when breaking, as a gas shell is filled with a liquid (i.e.—gas condensed under high pressure, which instantly vaporizes on bursting). Of course, if a gas shell bursts near you, you must stop breathing instantly, until you have put on and adjusted your gas-mask! Then you may have to work for hours with that on. I could write whole pages about the various gases used in this war and their different effects on the human body, but just let me say that they are all horrible and cause a lingering and painful death. I pray God that if I have to give up my life in this war it will be with a bullet and not gas! At intervals between the roaring of the big guns you can hear the "spit" of the rifles as the infantry open fire and high over head you will hear the purring of the airplanes as they go up to make observations, range corrections, etc. And the enemy airplanes go up to give battle and you can hear the

“drumming” of their machine guns as they fight, too. At about five minute intervals star shells are sent up. They burst away up over “No Man’s Land,” and hang suspended in the air, casting a very bright light over “No Man’s Land.” And in the town behind our lines you will see the powerful searchlights sweeping the sky for any enemy airplane that might slip through our lines. If one does, their anti-aircraft guns open up, too, and then more airplanes come up. And so it goes.

A day battle is just the same, only our hardest fighting is at night. And what makes me sick is to see the wounded horses and mules; they do not understand it all and are perfectly innocent anyway. So you see it is all a game of chance; if no shell strikes near you, or no stray bullet finds you, you are lucky, that’s all.

Of course you can only stand the strain of the trenches a certain length of time. Then you go to a town behind the lines, but even there you can hear the distant roar, like thunder, of the guns; and the airplanes are constantly scouting overhead. There are no lights allowed at night—all the windows, etc., have heavy shutters, and there are no street lights. It seems very funny to stroll through the town in early evening and not see a light anywhere—big buildings, etc., but all dark. It makes it hard to find one’s way around; however, thanks to you, I have the flash light you gave me, and I use it constantly. I don’t know what I would do without it. There are no amusements here, and unless one drinks he is out of luck. There are plenty of cafés, but as I do not care for that stuff, I spend most of my time exploring old ruined châteaux of which there are several on the outskirts of the city. They are very beautiful and old-fashioned, some of them even have “moats” around them and great iron gates, etc., just like the castles you read about in olden times. I often wonder what has become of the people who lived there before the war. I also like to go out into the woods and fields and gather flowers. There are many beautiful ones here. Some that we do not have in America. Or perhaps I take a stroll through one of their beautiful parks, or play with the children. I know nearly every little French kid in town. The little boys love to put on my steel helmet and belt, etc., and play soldier, boylike. When they have

a gun on their hip they think they are "it." But I wish you could see them stand at "attention" and salute. Believe me, these little children know what war means!

Sincerely,

E. J. CANRIGHT

Sanitary Detachment 149th Field Artillery
A.E.F. via New York

SOMEWHERE IN FRANCE

March 21, 1918

MY DEAR BLANCHE: I just received your letter dated January 30, so you see how irregular our mail is.

You asked me if I had seen any signs of war, etc. I have seen many thousands of German prisoners. I saw them the very first day I struck France, as they were working around the docks. And there are thousands of them in every camp I have been in. They do all the building, repairing, etc., around camp. Of course there are no prisoners here as we are too near the German lines, and they might escape too easily. As for wounded—well, I have seen wounded soldiers of every nationality engaged in this war (including our own). And you speak of guns and airplanes. Gee, I can see and hear them even in my sleep! I have seen all kinds of airplanes and also guns of every size and description! And besides all of these I have seen many beautiful homes and villages destroyed by bombs or shell fire.

Last night the enemy tried to break through our lines, but I am glad to say he did not succeed. However, I wish you could have been here and seen and heard the fighting.

That reminds me of a little incident. Saturday afternoon I was going up town and as it was a beautiful day the aviators were out in full force. There had been several rather exciting air battles during the day. Well an enemy airplane squadron attempted to come over. They succeeded in getting over the town so the "alert" was sounded. (That is the signal for everyone to get off the streets and seek shelter in the buildings designated for that purpose.) Of course, everybody immediately ran for shelter and so, just to see what it was like, my friend and I also went down into the cave. But we couldn't stand that very

long; we wanted to see the fun. So we "beat it" altho the people thought we were crazy. We ran up the street to the Square so that we could get a good view, and really you would have laughed if you could have seen us. All the streets were deserted. You couldn't see any French people anywhere, but here lined up in a row, like a bunch of "hay seeds" just arrived, were the American soldiers all breaking their necks to *see* the fight. The airplanes, of course, were right over us but fortunately our airmen were keeping the enemy busy so he didn't have time to notice us. High overhead, so high that they looked like black specks, were the airplanes. You could not, with the naked eye, distinguish our planes from the "Boche," but we could hear the rattle of their machine guns and could see the bursts of the anti-aircraft guns, breaking all around the airplanes. Some bursting in front, some behind, some falling short, etc. It was very exciting. Our airmen soon drove them back.

It is the same in the trenches. When the Americans fire a shot everybody sticks his head over the gun pit to see if it hits the mark—if it does, we cheer, and if it doesn't, we swear—while the French all duck their heads when firing. Every American soldier over here comes from "Missouri," I guess, as they all have to see everything that goes on, even though they are apt to get "picked" off by some "sniper" when they stick their heads up.

We have not had a very cold winter—some snow but not much. It is very springlike now.

Love,

E. J. CANRIGHT

Sanitary Detachment

149th Field Artillery

A.E.F. via New York

SOMEWHERE IN FRANCE

May 2, 1918

MY DEAR JANE: I am conceited enough to think that you would not recognize me now, as I have been for the past few days just covered with mud from head to foot. But, if you could see what we have been doing and how we are living, you would understand that it is impossible for us to pretend to keep clean.

I am stationed with one of the most advanced batteries. We live, of course, in an abri many feet below the ground. The abri is lined with steel and heavy beams and is covered with many feet of rocks and earth. It is always cold and very damp. The floor is covered with slimy mud and water, even though we try to bale it out every day. And, of course, our quarters are very cramped as we sleep in tiers, one above the other. You cannot sit up straight in bed. If you try to you will bump your head against the bed above you. And it is very dark as, of course, there are no windows and only one small door, and that does not let in much light as it leads down from the trench above. However, we have been so busy giving the Hun hell (pardon me), that we have very little chance to sleep, and when we do we are so tired that we just pull off our boots and crawl into bed and go right off to sleep, even though the big guns all around us are pounding away so that the air is constantly filled with their "shrieks" and "whines" and even way down where we are, one can feel the earth tremble from the shock of the guns as they fire. Of course, I am here to take care of anyone that gets hurt, and that is all I am supposed to do, but nevertheless I take turns "standing at the guns" and hauling ammunition, etc., and that is no easy task when you consider that we have to walk along a long, narrow trench, running from the abri to the gun pits. The trench always has six inches to a foot of water in the bottom, and on the bottom there may be some slippery, slimy boards or rocks, and the sides of the trench are just wet clay and mud. And then, to add to your difficulties, it is roofed over, which makes it dark as a pocket, and in places it is not deep enough to allow you to walk standing straight up, so unless you are pretty well acquainted with the position you are apt to get some awful cracks on your "dome," but thanks to your steel helmet it won't knock you out. You'll just "see stars" for a few minutes. One has to be pretty careful when carrying ammunition through there. It kind of gives you a creepy feeling when you think what might happen if you should slip when carrying a big shell in your arms and it should strike on a rock just right! You would be "pushing daisies up in skeleton park, tout de suite."

And then we take turns standing guard on the guns at night. We have to watch and be ready to fire instantly in case the signal for a "barrage" should go up. I was on watch night before last from three o'clock in the morning to six; and last night from eleven o'clock to three o'clock this morning. It is very interesting when you are on guard as you can see the flashes of the guns in the different batteries around you and in that way you discover batteries that you could not *see* in the day time. And you can see the star shells rise and burst over "No Man's Land" every few minutes; and when the big guns stop firing for a few minutes, you can hear the bursts of the machine guns. One will "open up" away off on your right; then another will start in, off on the left, etc. And one feels well repaid for all his hardships by the thrill that goes through him when *we* get the signal to fire and the men jump to their posts. Each one knows just what his work is. For instance, one cleans the shell and passes it on to the next man, and he greases it; then the next one screws in the fuse and shoves it in the breech, etc. This all takes only a matter of a second or so, and then the gun is fired. The order may call for a certain number of shells per gun per minute "at such and such a range," but it's great sport to stand there and watch our guns give the Hun hell (pardon me again). You have to plug up your ears with cotton, because if you didn't the terrific noise and concussion of the guns would break your ear drums. But, nevertheless, that's when I'm happy. Didn't I tell you that I was made a dental assistant right after we left Fort Sheridan and kept it until just a few weeks ago? I gave it up because I want to be here where I can take part in killing off the Huns. This is the life, in spite of all our hardships. It's lots of fun to watch when the Hun gets scared. You can always tell because he keeps sending up star shells so we can't surprise him. Now, that I have seen how he has destroyed beautiful little towns and villages and made innocent little children suffer, he gets no mercy from me.

Love,

E. J. CANRIGHT,

Sanitary Detachment, 149th Field Artillery
A.E.F. via New York

IN THE LAND OF THE BARBED WIRE

May 12, 1918

MY DEAR FOLKS: Sometime ago, when I was in one of the largest cities in this part of France, I met a very charming young French girl. Needless to say, we became very good friends and when I left that beautiful city she gave me a little "charm" which she said I should wear, always, and no harm would come to me; so I let her pin it on the inside of my coat, just for fun. But I am almost inclined to believe it is a charm. When I went on guard at three o'clock this morning it was very dark and foggy—in fact so dark that you could not see an inch in front of you. I was not in the trench but walking on top, and of course you cannot have a light—not even a flash-light, because if you did, a German "sniper" might see you and take a "pot shot" at you. (During the daytime you cannot walk up there at all.) Well, I lost my direction in the dark and the first thing I knew I felt myself falling—I had walked right on to the camouflage over the trench. The trench in that spot was about eight feet deep and lined with rocks. On the bottom was about a foot of mud and water. And on a short trestle, to keep it out of the mud, was a little railroad track—used for hauling ammunition. My steel "derby" protected my head from the rocks, and by a miracle I missed the railroad track and just hit the mud—so I had a nice mud bath. I was soaked through and my clothes were just covered with that awful, sticky mud! But I was lucky at that. I could easily have broken my neck. Of course, I was mad and had to "let off steam" by swearing! Here I was soaked to the skin and covered with mud and I had four hours more to stand guard. You cannot leave your post when you are on guard, no matter what happens. Your life as well as the lives of your comrades depend on your sticking to your post. It was a cold, raw morning, too, but I guess because I was so "hot" mentally I did not catch cold. So you see I was lucky all the way around, and perhaps the "charm" did help, and when I was relieved in the morning I could not build a fire in our abri as you cannot build a fire during the day because the Huns could see the smoke coming from the chimney, and then they would discover your location and you would soon be receiving some of

their "greetings," i.e., high explosives, gas shells, etc. You see this is a game of hide and seek—but it's great sport, believe me. However, to return to my story, the fellows took a knife and scraped the mud off of me and the sun came out about noon, so I soon dried off. Now I feel fine.

We have quite a few shell holes around our place, as the Germans shell us once in a while. But really they are doing us a favor (although they don't know it) as we have no way of washing here excepting in those shell holes. Every time it rains they get full of water and we use them to wash in (providing they are not shell holes made from gas bombs, as then the water would be poison). We do not even cook our meals here—our "mess" is brought to us each day. Nor do we have our horses here. They are back of the "horse lines." I had occasion to go somewhere in a hurry the other day, and I managed to find a bicycle—it seemed awfully funny to ride a bicycle after riding a horse so much.

There is, or rather was, a pretty little village just a little way down the road from here; but now it is nothing but ruins and deserted. It just makes you sick to go through here and see what was once a peaceful little village, with pretty and comfortable homes, etc., and now all ruined and desolate—nothing but rats living there. You can even see the furniture, and the pictures, etc., still hanging on the walls—where there are any walls left.

It is because of just such scenes as this, that I am the happiest when we are giving the "Hun" hell—and we have been giving it to him, too, I can assure you. Sometimes when we have been firing very fast our guns get so hot that we have to pour water down the barrel and place wet sand bags on them, etc., to cool them off. But even then you could fry eggs on the breech.

Sincerely,

E. J. CANRIGHT

Sanitary Detachment,

149th Field Artillery A.E.F.

SOMEWHERE IN FRANCE

May 24, 1918.

MY DEAR JANE: They say that all good things come together and I guess that must be true because yesterday we got paid and

got brand new uniforms and had a nice, hot shower bath and a shave and a haircut—all of which I was sorely in need of. And today we received mail from the States!

A few days, or rather nights, ago we were relieved by another battery. As soon as it got dark they brought up our horses. (You see we had to move at night so the enemy wouldn't see us.) It was a beautiful moonlight night—a full moon. We could see the road like a ribbon winding down in the valley, below, and the woods and fields all bathed in moonlight. It was a wonderful scene and one that I will never forget. The road was fine—just like a boulevard and lined with beautiful trees. All roads in France are like that. I had a good horse and he was feeling good, too, so I trotted a little ahead of the rest. We were all feeling good just then as we had done some very good work with our guns that afternoon. I cannot tell all that we did but I will say that there were a few less Huns in the world when we got through. And then the beauty of the night affected us, too—why you could even smell the flowers growing in the fields and along the road—the air was heavy with their fragrance. We rode in silence, of course, but you could hear the tramping of the horses' feet and the rumble of the gun carriages and every now and then we could hear the distant "boom" of the guns or see a star shell go up, away off to our left. Shortly before dawn we arrived at our destination, just outside of a little village. I just rolled up in my blankets and slept out in the field the rest of the night. And believe me it sure did seem good to sleep out in the open where I could see the moon and the stars and smell the perfume of the flowers and breathe plenty of fresh air, after living in one of those dark, damp, musty, rat-filled abris. In fact I was enjoying it so much, I didn't go to sleep for a long time but just lay there and "took it all in."

I could hear the clock in the church tower, in the town, toll off the hours. But I did not get up for breakfast. I slept, instead. However, when I did get up, I found to my joy that there is a river running through here. The water is clear and cold, as the current is very swift; but nevertheless we lost no time "getting in" and we sure did have some fun swimming around. I go swimming every chance I get. Then after I had got all

cleaned up, I went up town. It seemed mighty good to see stores and houses and people again and children playing in the streets and people strolling along the walks. You see I hadn't seen anything like that in weeks as there are no civilians or stores or houses at the front. (The stores and the houses are all destroyed.)

As I told you in the beginning of this letter, I got all "dolled up" yesterday and I had also been given a gold service chevron, so I went up town again last night and had a French Madame sew my gold chevron on my sleeve (left), and while I was up there I met Bill Tursman (one of our fellows), and as we hadn't seen each other in a long time, we went in a café and sat down and told each other what we had been doing and our different experiences, etc. It was just getting dark when I left him and started back to camp. When I was walking through the field I noticed a little boy and girl driving some cows through the field and all of a sudden I heard a terrific crash and saw a puff of smoke, just a few feet in front of me! My first thought was that the Germans were shelling us; but then I knew that couldn't be it because I hadn't heard the whine of a shell. So then I looked up in the sky to see if any Boche airplane was dropping bombs, but I couldn't see or hear one. However, by that time the smoke had cleared away and I saw a little boy lying all huddled up in the grass. I ran to him and saw that he had evidently found a hand grenade and picked it up and it had exploded. A piece of it had gone clear through his little body, entering just below the stomach and coming out the back. I knelt down to see if I couldn't stop the flow of blood and to feel his pulse. When his little sister saw him lying there all covered with blood she began to scream; in a minute the little fellow's mother and another little sister came running. When his mother saw him she, too, screamed and threw herself on him and started kissing his face. But I stopped her and told her she mustn't do that. Then she threw her arms around my knees and looked up at me with the most agonizing expression I have ever seen and just begged me to say "non mort" (not dead) "non mort." She kept saying that and his little sisters stood there crying as though their hearts were broken. I knew there was no chance of saving the little fellow's life, but I picked him

up in my arms and started to carry him to the ambulance, but he died in my arms; one of his little hands (he was only four) was fastened tight around my fingers! He had blue eyes and soft, silky, light hair—made me think something of John, his little neck was just as warm and soft. I will never forget the little fellow as long as I live! My hands and clothes were covered with blood and when I looked at it I thought, Oh, why couldn't it have been *me* instead of him. He had his whole life before him, but was one of the innocent victims of this awful war.

The news of the accident had spread by the time I got back to camp, and the fellows were pretty thoughtful and sober, that night. They all began talking about their little brother or sister at home—it almost seemed as though they all had one.

Little children over here ought to be taught not to pick up things like unexploded shells or hand grenades, etc., as they are very dangerous. I have seen soldiers injured by the same thing.

Although I have seen wounded and dead soldiers, nothing has ever affected me as this little fellow's death—it was so sudden and unnecessary.

But enough of this—I shouldn't have told you about it, only it had made such an impression on me—so excuse me.

Love,

E. J. CANRIGHT,

Sanitary Detachment,

149th Field Artillery

A.E.F. via New York

SOMEWHERE IN FRANCE

June 18, 1918

CHER AMI: A few days ago I received a very nice letter from your mother and also one from your father—both of which I enjoyed very much and will answer in the near future.

We have been very busy of late, and what little spare time I have I use to try and catch up on lost sleep! I think I have become quite expert now on sleeping as I can sleep at any time and anywhere and under any condition—I even think I could sleep standing on my head! But it's a great life, nevertheless, and I wouldn't take anything for the experiences I am having.

The other day we took some guns away up near the front line trenches. There was a little town down in the valley, and we were on the side of the hill, just outside of the town—right out in the field with no protection at all (no abris or trenches)! I wish you could have heard the German machine guns firing at one of our airplanes that flew over their lines. It sounded like New Year's Eve and the Fourth of July, combined! But that didn't scare us—we "opened up" and sent over a nice shower of high explosives, shrapnel, etc.! It was lots of fun. The old Germans got "mad as a hornet" because, I guess, our shells were "handling" them pretty rough—putting some of the Huns out of commission, etc.! So pretty soon we heard the whine of his shells coming our way! But fortunately he thought we were on the other side of the town, so he shelled the hill on the opposite side of the town! (It was one of those little "one street" towns that are so common in France.) I can assure you it was very interesting and very thrilling to watch those shells bursting across from you and knowing that they were intended for you! There was one house standing a little farther up the hill than the rest and I expected every minute, to see a shell strike and destroy that house, as they were bursting all around it—shooting up mountains of rock and dirt! The Germans kept that up until, I guess, they thought they had completely "wiped us off the earth"; then they stopped.

However, just about sunset and after our airplanes had come down, several "Boche" airplanes went up and began circling around way up over our heads, and in a few minutes we heard the "whine" of shells again, and this time they were bursting on our side of the town—just up the hill away, in front of us! At first we thought the Boche airplanes had located us and were directing the fire, but I guess they were just trying to find us because they began sweeping the hill (as we say), but stopped before they hit us.

I was real good last Sunday night and went to church for the first time in months! It was some church too! It was held in an old and deserted stone quarry—the rocks and walls of the quarry were covered with moss and there were even flowers growing in the crevices! It was very picturesque. The soldiers

sat around on the rocks and ledges—some of them even climbed way up near the top. The sermon was delivered by a Y. M. C. A. man. It was good, too.

Sincerely,

E. J. CANRIGHT,

Sanitary Detachment,

149th Field Artillery

A.E.F. via New York

SOMEWHERE IN FRANCE

July 1, 19 18

CHER AMI: We have been touring the country for some time now, and I have not received any mail nor had time to write for a long time.

This certainly is a wonderful country and the more I see of it the better I like it. There are beautiful winding roads with quaint and picturesque little towns dotting the roads, here and there, with their red tile roofs and white plaster walls showing through the trees. The houses are all built together—that is, one is built right on to the end of the other. But there is no uniformity as to size—one may be anywhere from a foot to a whole story higher than the one next to it, or anywhere from a foot to ten feet wider. This gives a very funny appearance—like a house built on the installment plan—as it really looks like one long house on each side of the street. And always there will be one-half of the house occupied by two or three cows and a horse or so and perhaps a few pigs and chickens, too. One might think from such arrangement that the people would be dirty and untidy, but such is not the case. When you enter their homes you will find the “pots and pans” all polished and shining and the floors, etc., all spotless. In some of the houses they have queer tile floors, something like our bathroom floors.

The French are a very hard working people. Those peasants are up early in the morning and work until late at night, some of them in the fields and some making willow baskets, etc.

We were billeted awhile ago in a very pretty little town right on a canal. It was very picturesque—like the ones you see in the movies. Great big trees on either side and a path on each

side for the mules or oxen to walk when pulling a barge along the canal. I was even fortunate enough to spend an afternoon on one of these queer barges. The bargemen live right on their boats with their wives and families—it is their home. There was good fishing in the canal too, but I didn't catch any.

In our wanderings we have picked up and adopted three little French boys that we found half starved and only half clothed and with no friends or relatives left. They are wearing our uniforms, although they are large for them, as the youngsters are only about ten or twelve years old. And we have also picked up a whole flock of the cutest little puppies you ever saw. So you see we are doing our share. I wish you could see the little French boys standing in mess line with their "kits" or see them strutting around town wearing spurs and "lording it" over all the other little French kids in the town. I'm sure the other youngsters envy them. We always give them our odd change so they can have a little spending money, too.

E. J. CANRIGHT,

Sanitary Detachment, 149th Field
Artillery, A. E. F. via N. Y.

SOMEWHERE IN FRANCE

July 8, 1918

MY DEAR FOLKS: I believe I have told you in another letter that because of the fine record we have made since we have been at the front we have been chosen for "shock troops." Well, we sure are being *shocked*!

Try and picture the very worst thunderstorm you have ever seen; then multiply it by about ten thousand and you will get some idea of the battle that has been and still is raging along this front and in which we are taking a very active part! The battle started shortly after midnight a few days ago and has been raging ever since! It started with a very heavy bombardment all along the front, and as the country here is very level and prairielike you can see for a long way, and I can assure you that it is some sight at night to see the blinding flashes of the guns all along the line—and even away off on the horizon you can see the pink glow flare up and die down and flare up and die

down again—very much like a city burning in the distance would look—and the roar and crash of the guns just seems to tear the air into shreds, and the concussion shakes the ground. And to add to the confusion you have the whine and shrieks of the shells, some coming and some going! And signal rockets of all colors and all descriptions are constantly shooting up into the air, as that is the way the army “talks” at night. It’s a wonderful sight! The first night a shell struck an ammunition dump and rockets went shooting in every direction; it lasted for several minutes and was very thrilling!

Of course every little while the “gentle Hun” sends over gas, so that we have to be constantly on the alert for it and wear our gas clothes most of the time—and carry our gas-masks all the time!

We all have cotton in our ears, but, nevertheless, the concussion of the guns has made some of us temporarily deaf. We have not taken off any of our clothes or gone to bed since the battle started. When it slows up a little we just lie down on the ground, right by the guns, and get what little rest and sleep we can. Our meals are brought to us, as we may not leave the position long enough to go and get them!

The first day they brought down an observation balloon right near us. An aviator attacked it and hit it with an incendiary bullet from his machine gun. The balloon came down in flames, but the observer jumped and came down in a parachute! However, about a minute later, and even before the observer had struck the ground another airplane had rushed up after the machine that “got” the balloon. It was partly cloudy that morning and he was trying to get away and hide behind the clouds, but the aviator brought him down and he came tumbling out of the clouds with his machine a mass of flames. That happened three days ago, and the burned and broken airplane is still lying there, and so are the two aviators! They are an awful sight as all the clothes and nearly all the flesh is burned off of them. (And what little is left is all charred and cooked!) And when the wind is in the right direction (or rather wrong direction) we get a very disagreeable odor, as there are several dead horses, etc., lying out there, too; no one has had time to bury them yet!

During the daytime there are a great many airplanes flying overhead, constantly trying to "see" what the other side is doing. We have witnessed some very exciting air battles. It is nothing unusual to see anywhere from two to two dozen airplanes fighting and chasing each other in and out of the clouds as they maneuver to get into position to fire—we can hear the "spitting" of their machine guns as they fire; sometimes you can hear them fighting when they are above the clouds, too! And twice a very daring German aviator flew down over our position and turned his machine gun on us! We could hear the "whang and spit" of the bullets as they struck the ground within a few feet of us! He flew so low that we could see the black cross on the plane and see the aviators shooting at us! But they didn't stay long. They would just shoot down and fire and then away they'd go before we had a chance to shoot back at them. You see we are right out in the open with no trenches or abris to protect us and so are an easy mark for anything like that! And the Huns have been sending over "beaucoup" shells, too! So the field around our position is all torn up with shell holes—some big ones, too, as they have shelled us with their big "220." One of those big shells makes a noise like the rumble and roar of a freight train going about a thousand miles an hour! When we hear them coming we say, "Here comes another of the Devil's fast freights!" And when they burst a mountain of rocks and dirt shoots up in the air higher than the trees! They make a hole about eight feet deep and about fifteen feet in diameter. And shell fragments scatter for about three hundred feet! A shell fragment makes an awful wound, too, as it just tears a great hole in you, while a bullet just drills a clean round hole! So you can imagine what would happen if one of those shells should get a "direct hit" on our position!

There is or rather ^{was} a little town over in a clump of trees near here—now there isn't even a wall or a piece of a house standing. There are just broken bricks and pieces of plaster scattered around.

Another thrilling sight is to see the ammunition caissons bringing up ammunition. Each caisson is drawn by six horses hitched

in teams of two, and a man rides the left horse of each team. They generally come up just before dark and you can see the long line of caissons stretching away down the road, and coming at a gallop. The horses are covered with sweat and lather when they get here! We unload the caissons in a jiffy and then they start back again, at a gallop, as the Huns are apt to shell the road at any time—so they are running for their lives! In fact the other night the road was shelled when they were bringing up ammunition! The driver swung off the road and came through the fields, spurring the horses to even greater speed!

This kind of warfare means a great many killed and wounded, but nevertheless I prefer it, as it is the only way to even end the war—just kill off all the Germans!

I have given you details and described disagreeable things, but I just want you to know what war is and what it means for us and for everyone!

But I think it's great sport and certainly am glad I'm here and taking part in this—one of the greatest battles the world has ever known.

Love,

E. J. CANRIGHT,

Medical Department

149th Field Artillery

A.E.F., A.P.O. No. 715

SOMEWHERE IN FRANCE

August 1, 1918

CHER AMI: To say that I am tired would be putting it mild, as we have been advancing right on the heels of the Germans! And that means, of course, that we have to travel over shell-torn roads and through woods and fields—any old way—so long as we get there! The weather has been bad lately, too, and the roads are very muddy and slippery, and the heavy caissons sink way in the mud, and they bump and slip and slide into the shell holes—sometimes you think they will certainly tip over or get stuck, but we always manage to get out some way—if a caisson gets stuck the men all take a hold and help the horses pull it out. It is very hard on the horses and on the men, too, and

especially at night because then it is so dark that you can't see where you are going—or even see the road! Twice my horse slipped in a shell hole but fortunately I felt him going in time, so I just took my foot out of the stirrup and slid off of him when he rolled over, so he didn't get on top of me. And in some places the roads are shelled so bad that we simply can't use them but turn off and travel through the woods and that is bad, too, because it is even darker there, and you have to watch out or some limb or branch of a tree will knock you out of the saddle. And so it goes! And when we get into "position" we fire until the Huns have retreated out of range of our guns and then we advance again, so you see it's pretty wearing on everybody and everything. But nobody complains—in fact we are all eager to keep going and drive the Huns back.

We are and have been for some time in territory just recently occupied by the Germans. The woods and fields—in fact the whole country around here—are full of dead Germans and dead horses—the stockyards in Chicago cannot smell any worse than the woods we are in right now! Most of the dead Germans here are either very young or quite old (the Germans retreated too fast to bury them). I have seen some rather pathetic sights, too. I found one German who had been shot in the knee and he was lying there with a photograph, evidently of his wife and two little daughters (they were nice-looking, too) still in his hand. But such is war!

When the Huns retreated they threw away some of their equipment—the woods are full of German ammunition of all kinds, hand grenades, rifles, bayonets, steel helmets, mess kits, canteens, and even clothes! So at last the "souvenir hunting" Americans can get all the souvenirs they want. The Huns must have stolen everything they could carry from the towns they captured as there is everything from baby carriages to sewing machines lying around in the woods and all kinds of civilian clothes, dishes, etc., and even tables and chairs.

Of course, we have a great deal of artillery here and keep pounding away at them day and night—the noise is deafening. The Hun aviators are constantly trying to slip past our aviators and drop bombs on us and swoop down and empty their machine

guns on us! I wish you could be here and see the fun when one does get through. Our machine guns open up on them of course, and we all have German rifles and "beaucoup" German ammunition that we have picked up and we get behind a tree or lie on the ground in the open and blaze away at them, *with their own ammunition*. It's great sport, I can assure you. The aviators never stay long, you may rest assured, as we make things pretty warm for them.

The other morning just as I was shaving, the Huns shelled the woods we are in. Oh Boy! but they sure did send them fast and one hit a tree just next to my bunk (we sleep on the ground) and cut the tree right in half. The concussion of the explosion made my ears ring for hours, and limbs and twigs and leaves fell all over me! I'll admit that for a second I thought it was "taps" for me. And do you know what flashed across my mind that instant? I thought of the good dinners I have had with you and now I would never have another. (You see our rations cannot keep up with us very well, so we are hungry all the time—that's why I thought of "eats.")

I used to fear death; but now I've seen so much of it that I do not fear it. Of course, I am young yet and enjoying life so do not want to die; but if I should be killed I would not be afraid.

Another very interesting sight was the towns we passed through coming up here that had not been shelled, as the Germans had not taken them; yet the people had gone away, as they feared the Germans would come—that was before we stopped their advance. We stopped in some of the towns and the place would be absolutely deserted, and yet the doors to the houses were unlocked and when you walked in you found everything just as the people had left it—dishes and silverware on the table and clothes hanging in the closets and sheets and pillows on the beds and pictures on the walls, etc., and stoves with the pots and pans and cooking utensils in the kitchen! And the big old "Grandfather" clock in the dining-room, too! The people who lived there will find things just as they left them when they return—we didn't take anything. Of course farther up towards the "front" it was the same old story—houses, churches, etc., all in ruins!

There are French officers and soldiers here with us too. I wish you could see them. They are a fine type of men and good soldiers, too. For instance, for the last day or so we haven't had any bread—and what little we did have was green with mold—so this noon the French gave us their bread. They will do anything for us! And they sure can fire their guns fast! And they “stick” to their guns and keep firing just as we do even when the shells are coming our way; and when you hear one coming it sounds as though it was going to hit right where you are standing—that takes nerve, too! You see we have no protection from shell fire and when they shell us, we just drop flat on the ground when a shell bursts near us, to avoid flying shell fragments as much as possible; and, believe me, they make a “*wicked*” whang and thud when they go over you and bury themselves in the ground! But the next instant we are on our feet and “feeding” the guns again!

Now have I explained enough why I do not write oftener? You see what little time we have, when we do not fire, we just drop down and sleep right by the guns (we have to sleep sometime you know). And we can sleep, too, even though the batteries right around us are firing—the roar and whine of the shells can't wake us!

Sincerely,

E. J. CANRIGHT,

Medical Department,

149th Field Artillery, A.E.F.

A.P.O. 715

August 2, 1918

CHER AMI: I wrote you a letter yesterday P. M. but have not had a chance to mail it yet. However I am glad of it, because last night we had the good fortune to bring down a Hun airplane. Several of them flew over just before dark and fired at us with their machine guns and we “opened up” on them with our machine guns and the rest of us seized our German rifles and ammunition and also fired at them and believe me it was some noise. But it's great sport and very exciting. Well, you can

imagine our joy when we saw one turn around and start to come down! I saw him just skimming over the tree tops and saw where he was going to land, so I started after him on the run. They lit in a field but purposely skimmed along the ground and ran the machine into the woods to damage it so that we couldn't use it—See? Of course, it hit the trees and broke the wings and propeller, altho the engine and body were all right. A Frenchman and I were the first ones to reach them, and the aviators, there were two of them, stepped out of their machine and held up their hands. They started to walk towards us but one of them staggered and fell. I saw that he was wounded so I dropped down to examine his wounds and give him first aid, while the Frenchman kept the other one covered with his rifle, as you can't trust a Hun—he might have shot me altho I was giving first aid to his companion. The pilot was wounded in several places, I discovered, after I had taken off his leather headgear and goggles and leather coat, etc. He was shot in the shoulder and on the leg and then I dug a shrapnel bullet out of his back. You can imagine my surprise when he started to speak to me in English! He said he used to live in Philadelphia. He told me he was twenty-nine years old and asked me if I thought he would die, and when I told him "No," he grabbed my hand and thanked me over and over again. Then he unpinned and gave me his aviator's badge—he said they would take it away from him anyway. I have it and shall keep it as a souvenir. I'll show it to you when I get back. Well, after I'd fixed him up, I saw that the observer had been wounded, too—shot just below the knee. It seemed funny to be giving first aid and trying to save their lives when just a minute or two before they had been shooting at us with their machine guns, trying to take our lives. But I consider that if I didn't do all I could to save them that I would be no better than they were. Of course a big crowd gathered in a few minutes and we sent the two aviators to the hospital in an ambulance, and under guard. As I said before, if they had been dropping bombs on some city and injuring innocent people, and I had got to them first, I would have shot them instead of giving them aid; but they were only shooting at us, and we are "fair

game," so it was a fair fight, and they should be treated accordingly. Wish you could have been here and seen it—you may see it anyway because they took pictures of it all.

As before,

E. J. C.